

## CFAC opposes Superfund designation

By LYNNETTE HINTZE/The Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Saturday, December 20, 2014 8:27 pm

Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. said Friday it opposes a Superfund designation for the aluminum plant site.

Owned by Swiss-based parent company Glencore, CFAC supports expediting a thorough investigation of the plant site and has retained environmental consulting firm Roux Associates to develop a remedial investigation work plan, according to a press release issued by CFAC.

Roux Associates is a nationally known firm experienced in assessing aluminum facilities.

The company does not want the plant site listed on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List for federal Superfund cleanup.

"First we have to do the assessment," CFAC spokesman Haley Beaudry said in a phone interview with the Inter Lake. "Right now everybody is assuming there is some cleanup to do, but we don't know that. I'm reluctant to put the cart before the horse."

Beaudry said the press release was circulated in response to a recent community meeting recently in Columbia Falls, where local residents were urged by the EPA to write letters in support of including the aluminum plant site on the National Priorities List.

"We wanted to let people know, in our opinion, that's not necessarily the best thing for the Flathead," said Beaudry, a former external affairs manager for CFAC who is no longer on the plant's payroll but serves as a consultant.

"While we understand the interest that some in the community and at the Montana Department of Environmental Quality have in gaining access to federal cleanup funds, we believe listing on the National Priorities List and designating the site as a Superfund site will unnecessarily delay the entire effort and become a detriment to economic development in the Flathead," he said.

The EPA said it could take two to three years to get the federal listing. If cleanup is warranted, it could be six years or so until that would begin.

Based on the history of other Superfund sites in Montana — some of which have been in process for more than 30 years — "it appears to CFAC that a National Priorities List listing is not likely to result in an efficient assessment or cleanup," Beaudry said.

In addition to delays, a Superfund designation stigmatizes properties, inhibiting potential developers and limiting economic growth, he said.

A native of Butte, Beaudry remembers a proposed water reservoir project in Butte that was nearly a done deal until a banker learned of the city's Superfund designation and backed out of the financing.

"None of the 18 Superfund sites in Montana has ever been removed from the list," Beaudry noted. "No project has ever been fully completed."

At the community meeting, EPA Environmental Engineer Rob Parker told residents that putting the plant site into the Superfund program would bring more money and technical resources to any cleanup effort.

The EPA has taken the lead on the investigation and any subsequent cleanup now that CFAC has broken off negotiations with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The federal agency also is searching for the responsible parties.

Asked whether Glencore stands ready to pay for any needed cleanup, Beaudry said he couldn't answer that because the investigation involves a process of determining who the "potentially responsible parties" are, including past owners.

The plant opened in 1955 and initially was owned by Anaconda Copper Mining Co.

The facility changed hands several times through the years. Atlantic Richfield Co. — known as ARCO — purchased Anaconda in 1977, becoming CFAC's second owner. When ARCO, now owned by BP, began divesting itself of its metals interests, Montana Aluminum Investors Corp. bought CFAC in 1985.

During 1999, the plant was acquired by Glencore International AG, a metals-trading firm and the current owner.

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